

# Family Engagement Overview

Welcome to RIF's Middle School Family Literacy Initiative (MSFLI). Family engagement is a key component of RIF's MSFLI effort. We know families engage with their children's learning in countless ways. RIF's perspective on the importance of family engagement and list of recommended tools and resources are listed here to support your efforts as you implement this program in partnership with RIF.

## **RIF's Definition of Family Engagement**

RIF defines family engagement as positive and ongoing relationships between students' families and educators. Building these relationships is a shared responsibility. Effective family engagement is asset-based, goal-oriented, and culturally affirming.

## **Why is family engagement important?<sup>1</sup>**

Meaningful family engagement...

- Is correlated with a decrease in drop-out rates and an increase in graduation rates amongst high schoolers
- Leads to increased student achievement
- Can reduce high levels of truancy
- Encourages students to have positive attitudes towards learning
- Is associated with improved social skills and higher expectations
- Can improve student-teacher relationships
- Supports the development of trust within schools
- Enhances educators' and students' cultural understanding

## **Best Practices for Increasing Family Engagement<sup>2</sup>:**

- Involvement → engagement! Shifting the lens and terminology from schoolcentric involvement to relationship-centric engagement can improve outcomes drastically.
- Welcome your families into the building. Invite families to come and join your classroom. Inviting families to engage in classroom activities can help them understand their children's day and spark family conversation about school.

<sup>1</sup>Flamboyant Foundation (2021). Family engagement matters. Flamboyant Foundation. <https://flamboyantfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2021-Family-EngagementMatters-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>Baker, T.L., Wise, J., Kelley, G., & Skiba, R.J. (2016). Identifying barriers: Creating solutions to improve family engagement. School Community Journal, 26(2), 161-184

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- **Make time for your families.** Schedule some time into your week for family engagement and reach out to the families in your class to seek input and provide updates.
- **Break down barriers to access.** Ask about schedules, preferred location for activities, and language preferences. Provide assistance for getting interpreters, transportation, and childcare.
- **Improve communication.** Ask for family preference for communication and seek administrative support to ensure your own access to a variety of communication techniques (e.g., communication apps, robocall, email, text, newsletter, homeschool liaisons). Make sure to provide a schedule of activities ahead of time and proactively make sure families know they are invited!
- **Provide opportunities for families.** Family literacy should be celebrated, so provide recognition when families engage in literacy activities when it suits them. Consider ways to highlight family literacy activities within the classroom. This could include weekends, virtually, after hours, or off school property (engagement doesn't have to mean physically present).

## RIF Family Resources

Below are several resources, tips and tools RIF is providing for you to share with your students' families to support their child's reading journey:

- **Texting.** RIF is offering monthly text messages to middle school families with recommended book lists and engaging reading activities. A tool kit to help you communicate this opportunity to our families is available. Note, your school has been designated a key word for parents to use to text and opt-in. Please see the Texting Tool kit or ask for your key word at [LiteracyNetwork@RIF.org](mailto:LiteracyNetwork@RIF.org).
- **Activity Packs.** RIF's specially curated middle school book collection features 12 thematic booklists and activity packets specifically designed to capture the interest and imagination of middle school students. Each monthly thematic packet includes a home activity. [Middle School Family Literacy Initiative Collection | RIF.org](https://www.rif.org/middle-school-family-literacy-initiative-collection)

Visit [RIF.org](https://www.rif.org) for free book activities

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- **Literacy Tracker.** Our free and easy to use Literacy Tracker Tool is also a great tool to share with your families who can use it at home with their child. Literacy Tracker | RIF.org • Ten Tips to Encourage your Teen to Read. Ten Tips to Encourage your Teens to Read (Ages 13+).pdf (rif.org)
- **#BookTok Challenge.** The RIF #BookTok Challenge is a great way to get families excited about reading. Encourage families to participate by sending students home with the #BookTok Challenge [activity sheet](#).
- **Family Literacy Night Resources.**
  - RIF hosted an interactive webinar modeling how to plan and implement a family literacy event at your school! To view this archive, please visit <https://www.rif.org/literacy-network/resources/webinars-tutorials>.
  - Learn some best practices from one of RIF's MSFLI program implementors. Read the Q&A [here](#).

Visit [RIF.org](https://www.rif.org) for free book activities